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How Effective and Capable Is Our Intelligence Agency?

By Robert C. Achorn

Editor of the Editorial Page

Everybody loves spy stories—except when our side gets caught as in the ill-fated U2 missions of Francis Gary Powers.

Unfortunately but inevitably, the United States sometimes fails in its spying. But it also has successes.

Spying is virtually synonymous with secrecy. Nonetheless, Andrew Tully has managed to piece together some fascinating espionage yarns in his new book, "CIA — The Inside Story," published by William Morrow and Co., New York.

Dulles' Reservations

This is not an authorized biography of the Central Intelligence Agency. CIA keeps its mouth shut — or is supposed to.

But Tully, who used to cover his home town of Southbridge for The Telegram and Gazette, is an experienced Washington reporter. The CIA has been on his beat. In a note of thanks, he acknowledges his debt to Allen W. Dulles, former CIA director, and to other American officials in close touch with the entire intelligence operation. Dulles has reportedly asked Tully to omit the thanks in any future edition; the volume is not to Dulles' liking.

Tully's book is written in popular style. It tells of hollow nickels with secret messages in them, of a coat hanger from which the CIA deduced the kind of metal alloy used in a Soviet bomber, and of the CIA tunnel 600 yards into East Germany —part of a plan for monitoring Communist telephone calls.

No Accounting

At the same time, this is not altogether an uncritical account. It raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the CIA and about its bent for making political decisions and executing them.

There is an interesting issue. How far can a free country go in turning the control of money, men, and policy over to a secret organization that does not account even to Congress?

Nobody on the outside knows how much the CIA spends each year, although the total has been reported at somewhere between 500 million and a billion dollars. Most of the money is hidden in the budget accounts of other agencies.

Scientific Skills

Nobody on the outside knows how many employes the CIA has, although the number has been put at 10,000 — or about

Andrew Tully

the same number as the State Department.

They are not all cloak and dagger people. Tully says the CIA "would be lost without its metallurgists, its chemists, its industrial engineers, its lawyers, its psychologists, and its nuclear scientists."

This is a vast operation. Every American embassy, according to Tully, has CIA operatives on its staff — just as every major country in the world has spies

In some American embassies, Tully says, CIA personnel have outnumbered Foreign Service employes.

He discusses CIA's successful ouster of Mossadegh in Iran and of the Communistic Arbenz regime in Guatemala. On the other hand, in Tully's view "CIA and the State Department tried to do the impossible in Laos and the result was that the United States suffered another defeat in a country on which it had lavished military and economic aid at the rate of $300 million a year."

The Cuban Story

Like almost every other Washington newsman, Tully has his own story of what went wrong in Cuba. He traces the basic failure to "CIA's apparently traditional unwillingness to do business with any but the forces of the far right."

President Kennedy issued an order excluding intimate Batista supporters from the proposed liberation army. But, according to Tully, the CIA "refused" to obey the President's order. Instead, it relied on Batista followers and locked up anti-Batista rebels who supposedly had a following in Cuba and might have been able to bring about an internal uprising.

Tully also contends that the CIA erroneously informed Kennedy that the Castro air force had been rendered ineffective by the first rebel air strike. But when the invasion forces arrived, "three American T-33 jet trainers, originally shipped to the Batista regime, suddenly appeared over the beachhead and went into action."

Stevenson's Role

Tully argues that President Kennedy's decision to cancel the second air strike was based in

Allen Dulles

part on the CIA's wrong assessment of the situation and in part on the vigorous protests of Adlai Stevenson, supported by Secretary of State Rusk.

Tully also contends that Kennedy gave the CIA the right to appeal his decision and that Allen Dulles failed to do so.

It is apparent that the argument over what actually happened at the time of the attempted invasion is going to continue for some time.

The CIA itself doesn't claim omniscience. In fact, most of the time it doesn't claim anything. It goes about its business, doing the best it can to advance the American interest as it sees that interest.

Enter McCone

This is, after all, a relatively new field for the United States. Our intelligence operations began to blossom in World War II, but we are still feeling our way, learning from mistakes and from successes.

Allen Dulles, the one American with a clearcut right, established over the years, to claim the title of supreme master spy, has retired. The CIA is now under the leadership of John A. McCone, who has won a reputation as an able administrator.

What this means for the CIA's future is not certain. But, as Tully's book makes clear, there is always work to be done in the intelligence field, and its nature is changing as the Communists step up their political and economic assaults on many fronts. Tully tells something of where the CIA has been. He doesn't tell where it is going, for that no man can know.

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